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RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 0486

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001630

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR AF/W, INR/AA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/26/2017

TAGS: PGOV PINR KISL NI

SUBJECT: SHIA LEADER ARRESTED IN CONNECTION WITH SUNNI SCHOLAR'S MURDER

REF: ABUJA 1558

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Robert Gribbin for reasons 1.4 (b & d)

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¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On July 20, police and State Security Services (SSS) arrested and detained prominent Shia leader Kasimu Rimin Tawaye and several members of Sokoto's minority Shia community in connection with the July 18 killing of Sunni scholar Umaru Hamza Dan-Maishiya (reftel); neither Tawaye nor any of his followers has been formally arraigned and remain in custody. Police rounded up 120 individuals on July 21 following three days of fighting and rioting between the city's Sunni and Shia residents in which 5 individuals were killed and several Shia homes destroyed. In statements attributed to Ibrahim al-Zakzaky, leader of the Shia community in Nigeria, al-Zakzaky denied any involvement of the Shia in the killing of the outspoken Sunni scholar though suggested that Dan-Maishiya's well-known antipathy towards Sokoto's Shia may have prompted his murder. The Nigerian government has repeatedly clamped down on al-Zakzaky and the Shia community over the past two decades and fears persist that Dan-Maishiya's killing will be used as a pretext for the police or SSS to hold indefinitely members of Sokoto's Shia community. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Police arrested and detained prominent Shia leader Kasimu Rimin Tawaye and several members of Sokoto's minority Shia community on July 20 in connection with the July 18 killing of Sunni scholar Umaru Hamza Dan-Maishiya (reftel). The State Security Services (SSS) on July 19 had apprehended two individuals suspected in Dan-Maishiya's killing. The interrogation of the two suspects may have revealed information implicating Tawaye and his followers. Neither Tawaye nor any of those detained by police has been arraigned in court and all remain in custody. Contacts contend that Dan-Maishiya may have been targeted for his outspoken criticism of the Shia community in Sokoto. Nigerian press reports that an unidentified man fleeing the scene of Dan-Maishiya's murder was reportedly killed by congregants at the Shehu Usmanu Dan Fodio Mosque on July 18. On July 21, police rounded up 120 individuals following three days of violence and looting between the city's Sunni and Shia residents. Media reports indicate that more than 13 Shia

houses were razed and 5 individuals killed in the fighting. A week after Dan-Maishiya's murder, tensions have eased as police and military continue to patrol the streets.

¶13. (SBU) An official statement attributed to the founder of the Shia community in Nigeria, Ibrahim al-Zakzaky, and posted on July 24 to the website of al-Zakzaky's group the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (www.islamicmovement.org) dubs Dan-Maishiya's killing a "political assassination" and declares "linking such a killing to any religious group is a blatant hoax." The statement indicts Dan-Maishiya as an "agent of the government" while also suggesting that his purported antipathy towards the Shia may have caused his death. Further, the statement accuses the government of failing to thwart the murder, instead proffering that the Sokoto state government in an attempt to "save face" had resorted to an "unprovoked attack on the Islamic Movement as a diversionary tactic."

¶14. (SBU) While open source reporting maintains that Dan-Maishiya was killed for his presumed anti-Shia bias and, perhaps, for purportedly "spearheading" an attack against the Shia community after its failed 2005 mosque take over attempt, the investigation continues. Tawaye and several members of the Shia community in Sokoto remain in police custody on July 27 with no formal arraignment. Fears persist that Dan-Maishiya's killing will be used as a pretext for the police or SSS to hold indefinitely members of Sokoto's Shia community.

¶15. (C) The Islamic Movement in Nigeria, also known as the Ikhwan al-Muslimeen or Muslim Brothers, publishes a weekly Hausa magazine entitled al-Mizan (www.almizan.net), whose editor Ibrahim Musa confirmed to PolOff on July 25 that al-Zakzaky's group believes that Dan-Maishiya was an "agent of the Nigerian government used to attack the Islamic

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Movement." When asked whether al-Zakzaky condoned Dan-Maishiya's murder, Musa maintained that "al-Zakzaky condemns brutality" while averring Dan-Maishiya's death was meant to stymie opposition to the government. Musa confirmed that al-Zakzaky travels frequently throughout the North (including Sokoto) to teach, but that indigene Imams in their respective locales remain in charge of leading local congregations. In response to the July 20 arrest of the leader of the Sokoto Shia community, Kasimu Tawaye, Musa suggested that the Islamic Movement is being targeted, as it had been in 2005, by the federal government. (NOTE: Following the botched June 2005 Shia take over of the Sultan Bello Mosque in Sokoto, several members of the Islamic Movement in Sokoto were arrested and detained by the security services. At the time, al-Zakzaky denied any involvement of the Shia in the take over. Instead, Musa maintained to PolOff, the "government staged the event in order to oust the Shia from Sokoto." END NOTE.)

¶16. (C) COMMENT: Shi'ism in Nigeria is a recent development, dating to the 1980s when it was first introduced by Zaria-native Ibrahim al-Zakzaky. Al-Zakzaky, who recently visited Iran for medical care, maintains close ties with the Shia religious establishment in Qom. He estimates his Nigerian followership at 3 million. In Nigeria, Shi'ism represents an anti-establishment movement that militates against normative northern religious practices viewed as un-Islamic or syncretistic, as well as prevalent political structures which are viewed as legitimating secular forces in society. Shi'ism resonated with factions of Nigerian Muslims in the 1980s as it was an avenue for dissent against military rule. It continues to appeal particularly to college-educated students and others who have become disenfranchised or alienated by traditional Nigerian Islamic institutions. The Nigerian government has repeatedly clamped down on al-Zakzaky's movement, imprisoning him several times over the past 20 years. This has helped force the movement into quiescence, but also has aided it in garnering support.

END COMMENT.
GRIBBIN